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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002155

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KS](#) [JA](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: ROK SEEKS U.S. VIEW ON KOREA-JAPAN-CHINA DEFENSE
TRILATERALS

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSEPH YUN. REASONS 1.4 (b
/d)

¶1. (C) On November 3, MOFAT ROK-US Security Cooperation Director Kim Yong-hyon demarched the POL-MIL chief on a South Korean proposal to hold ROK-Japan-China defense trilateral meetings in 2009. Kim explained that the ROK planned to discuss the idea with the Japanese at the ROK-Japan bilateral security consultation meeting on November 13. Simultaneously, the ROK would raise it with the Chinese through diplomatic channels. If all three governments agree, a proposal to hold a "ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Defense Dialogue" would be put on the agenda as a deliverable for the ROK-Japan-China leaders summit meeting scheduled to take place in Fukuoka, Japan on December 14. Kim added that the idea would be for the leaders of those three neighboring countries to point to the announcement of this new dialogue as a positive example of enhanced cooperation in Northeast Asia.

¶2. (C) Kim went on to explain that the ROKG intends to hold the dialogue one rank below the level of the U.S.-ROK-Japan Defense Trilateral Talks taking place in Washington this week; this probably means at the level of office directors. He said the agenda for the ROK-Japan-China defense trilateral would be limited to the topics of disaster relief, humanitarian relief and PKO activities. He assured that agenda would not outpace the U.S.-Japan-ROK defense trilateral, pointing out that the PRC would very likely approach the initiative with great caution.

¶3. (C) ACTION REQUEST: MOFAT wanted to alert the USG in advance so they have time to receive U.S. views on the idea before ROK officials meet with the Japanese and discuss it with the Chinese next week. Embassy therefore requests the Department's guidance by November 11.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While we should urge the ROK and Japan to, first and foremost, increase their level of security cooperation with each other through this year's revived U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Defense Talks, we also believe we should welcome the Korean proposal for the start of a ROK-Japan-China trilateral defense dialogue next year. We believe it will result in enhanced transparency between the

Chinese, Japanese and Korean militaries, and that better communication between the three should be welcomed by Washington. Because of the historical animosities that exist between those three Northeast Asian neighbors, the more they keep in touch with one another cooperatively the better.

STEPHENS